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FM AMCONSUL CALCUTTA
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 1099
INFO RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI PRIORITY 0987
RUEHCG/AMCONSUL CHENNAI 0386
RUEHBI/AMCONSUL MUMBAI 0386
RUEHIL/AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD 0179
RUEHKA/AMEMBASSY DHAKA PRIORITY 0230
RUEHGO/AMEMBASSY RANGOON 0157
RUEHKT/AMEMBASSY KATHMANDU 0231
RUEHCN/AMCONSUL CHENGDU 0024
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RUEHCI/AMCONSUL CALCUTTA 1344

UNCLAS CALCUTTA 000362

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E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PREL](#) [PTER](#) [PINR](#) [IN](#) [XD](#) [NCTC](#)

SUBJECT: LACK OF TRUST CONTINUES TO STIFLE PEACE TALKS IN ASSAM

¶1. (U) SUMMARY: Local media reports that hurdles for direct talks between Government of India (GOI) and United Liberation Front of Assam (ULFA) have been reduced, with New Delhi agreeing to release five militant leaders and ULFA announcing a "cessation of hostilities" against the Indian Army. ConGen's contacts with security officials and political observers in Assam, however, indicate that while some progress has been achieved, ULFA is yet to abjure violence completely and a lack of trust between the state apparatus, ULFA and other tribal militant groups still plagues the future of the talks and the end of hostilities in the state. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (U) On August 19, 2006 press reports stated that ULFA had announced a unilateral ceasefire in recognition of the GOI initiative to call off army operations for ten days prior to India's independence celebrations on August 15, 2006. The reports also indicated that National Security Adviser, M.K. Narayanan had assured the Peoples' Consultative Group (PCG) representatives on the release of five top ULFA prisoners. (Note: On September 8, 2005, ULFA had announced a nine-member "Peoples' Consultative Group" to work out the modalities for their formal peace talks with GOI. The PCG included, among others, noted Assamese litterateur, Indira Goswami, former footballer Rebati Phukan, and journalists Ajit Bhuyan and Hyder Hussain. Goswami and Phukan were tasked to be the principal facilitators for the talks with the GOI. End Note.). The media inferred that the thaw between the two sides was brightening the prospects of durable peace.

¶3. (U) Inspector General of Police, Special Branch (IGP-SP), Khagen Sarma informed ConGen that ULFA has so far only "agreed to respect" the GOI initiative to stop army operations for the ten day period. While Sarma felt that this is a positive step, he noted that ULFA did not intimate anything directly to either the Central or State government but informed the PCG, who in turn issued a press release to the media. Sarma observed that on August 21, ULFA Chairman Arabinda Rajkhowa denied that ULFA has made any commitment of a "unilateral ceasefire" or an end to violence. On August 20, Chief Secretary of Assam, S. Kabilan stated that "the temporary truce is in the newspapers, but we are yet to get any communication from the Center. Probably it is not final."

¶4. (U) IGP-SP Sarma informed ConGen that the no decision has yet been taken by the GOI on the release of the five ULFA prisoners. Sarma noted that processing has begun, but there is some way to go before the prisoners are released. The GOI is seeking personal guarantees of a commitment to peace talks and

forsaking of violence from PCG representatives prior to releasing the prisoners. The GOI is wary of its 1991 experience, when it had released some senior ULFA leaders to pave the way for peace talks, only to see the prisoners vanish and the talks break down. The trust between the government, both at the center and state, and the ULFA is yet to be built, say ConGen contacts.

15. (SBU) COMMENT: The halting of army operations for a ten day period appears to have been the GOI's strategy to ensure peaceful Independence Day celebrations in the Northeast. While the PCG may be keen to ensure that this truce can be made more durable, so far state officials are closely watching the parleys between GOI and the ULFA leadership as the PCG attempts to work out a deal. Complicating the task is management of the various tribal militant groups in the area, many of whom do not entirely trust ULFA to represent their views. Even an agreement on a cease-fire will likely not be unanimously adhered to by the more hard-line tribal militants. END COMMENT.
JARDINE